

**FINAL EVALUATION OF
USAID/OTI'S PROGRAM IN COLOMBIA**

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Finally, it should be noted that I conducted this assessment alone, and did not have the opportunity to 'field test' my findings or conclusions with a co-evaluator(s) before putting them into print. Thus, while the facts presented herein are probably correct, my interpretations of them--and thus my conclusions--are at times highly subjective. Informed readers are invited to challenge those conclusions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Colombia has been at war with itself for the better part of fifty years--strife interrupted but not ended by the National Front accord of 1958-1974. Several Colombian presidents have attempted to reach negotiated settlements with various armed factions over the past twenty years. Some of these efforts were successful, most notably including the dismantling of the M-19 guerilla in the late 1980s-early 1990s, and the transformation of that group into a mainstream political party.

Meaningful negotiations stalled in 1994 with the election of Ernesto Samper, and the armed guerillas' increasing reliance on criminal activity and narcotics trafficking (rather than on any substantive ideological convictions) as the bases for their continuing struggle. The United States had worked with Colombian administrations for over two decades prior to 1994 to stem the production and shipment of illicit narcotics. These contacts were greatly reduced after 1994, however, as the USG concluded that the Samper administration was not a reliable partner in those efforts. Meanwhile, the narcotics industry, its linkages with armed rebel groups such as the FARC and ELN--and the overall level lawlessness and armed conflict increased dramatically in Colombia.

Andes Pastrana campaigned successfully for the Colombian presidency in 1998 as a candidate committed to the pursuit of peace. His message resonated well with a Colombian population exhausted by chronic conflict, and with the USG, which indicated its readiness to once again engage with a Colombian Government eager to undertake a genuine assault on the narcotics sector. In August of 1998 an USG Interagency Working Group chaired by the NSC instructed USAID to develop a proposal to support Colombian alternative development efforts as part of an overall counter-narcotics strategy, and a proposal to strengthen the protection of human rights as part of a process to end the violence in Colombia. The response, which USAID developed during August-December 1998, included a nascent long-term strategy (what was to become the USG-assisted portion of Plan Colombia), and a short-term strategy managed by OTI.

The essential thrust of the OTI strategy developed during the autumn-winter of 1998 was to 1) support GOC peace initiatives at the national level (though the precise mechanism for doing so would not be established for another year); 2) enlist the participation of civil society as advocates in support of the peace process; and 3) work with communities in rural conflict areas in ways which would give these communities a stake in peace, an alternative to the armed guerillas' blandishments, and a strengthened confidence in the Colombian Government's capacity to address their needs. An initial focus of the community-based activities was to have been the *despeje*, or demilitarized zone, established by President Pastrana as a good faith gesture to the FARC.

Phase I

“Phase I” is used in this report to describe those activities which were designed during the period (August 1998-December 1999) when OTI managed the Colombia program from OTI/Washington. Phase I projects included:

- Project:* “Emergency Response to the Conflict Zone in Meta”
Grantee: Salesian Missions, Arlington, VA (on behalf of the Diocese of Ariari, Meta)
- Project:* “ICRC ‘Peace Fund’”
Grantee: International Committee of the Red Cross, Bogota, Colombia
- Project:* “Technical Study Groups on the Issues of the Colombian Peace Process Agenda”
Grantee: Georgetown University, Washington, DC; sub grantee: Javiariana University, Bogota, Colombia

By early 1999 OTI was prepared to launch the first elements of its Colombia program. These included a community empowerment and development project managed by the **Salesian Missions in the department of Meta** (January, 1999-December, 2001. Value: \$314,000); and a geographically broader community development activity (“Quick Impact Projects”) sponsored by the **International Committee of the Red Cross** (March, 1999-September, 2000. Value: \$750,000).

The Salesian Missions’ project--eventually designed to work in areas contiguous to but not inside the *despeje*-- included a sub-activity intended to “insulate” area youth from possible recruitment by the FARC by providing these young people with scholarships to attend agricultural and vocational training institutions located outside of the *despeje*. The project also emphasized the development of income-generating/micro credit activities which would give low-income families (and especially internally displaced families) an opportunity to regain an economic footing in their new communities. The ICRC implemented its subprojects in conflict areas located throughout the country. Unlike the Salesians’ activity, however, the ICRC tended to emphasize community infrastructure activities (schools, community recreation facilities, health posts, etc.) in the belief that “economic” projects such as those favored by the Salesians might serve as inducements to potential IDPs to leave their home communities.

Further to its original intention to support the peace process at the national level, OTI’s third “Phase I” project was designed to help the GOC develop the elements of its negotiation agenda *vis-à-vis* the *Fuerzas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). The grant agreement which OTI signed with **Georgetown University--and with Javiariana University, Bogota serving as the sub-grantee and implementing party**--was intended to develop the information GOC negotiators needed to interact substantively with their

FARC counterparts.

Phase I: Performance and Impact

The **Salesian Missions'** project in Meta was implemented in a manner generally consistent with their grant agreement. The Salesians completed some 14 community infrastructure projects, approved 326 micro credit loans, and awarded 343 scholarships to students attending eight training institutions in Meta department. Importantly, the project represented the first instance in Colombia in which a USG-financed project focused--by design--on the plight of IDPs. The project also broke new ground in its demonstration to other elements of the USG that USG-supported programs could be successfully implemented in high-conflict areas of the country. OTI concerns with the project focused on the grantee's chronic lateness in providing project performance information (which, given the country's security situation, were needed by OTI staff who could only rarely visit project sites to observe operations first-hand), and repeated inaccuracies in the grantee's financial reporting. Moreover, OTI grew increasingly skeptical of the project's claims regarding the number of students "rescued" from the FARC via the project's scholarship program. The activity effectively ended on schedule in April 2001, and has been granted a no-funds extension to December of this year to complete its closeout tasks and to prepare a final report.

Despite some initial disagreements between OTI and the **ICRC** regarding the ground rules for their project (regarding, e.g., contacts with rebels, prohibitions on project work inside rebel-controlled areas; the need to screen potential beneficiaries to exclude those affiliated with guerillas, etc.), the project was implemented with considerable success in several regions of the country. By the time the project ended in September 2000 it had completed a total of 54 community development and (eventually) income-generating grants which benefited, by the ICRC's calculations, over 120,000 people directly and indirectly. Moreover, the project had leveraged some \$510,000 in counterpart funding (cash and in-kind) from participating communities and various local/national government entities. As an indication of the project's success, USAID proposed to extend the activity into urban and additional rural areas (and to add \$1.5 million to the grant agreement), but the extension was declined by ICRC/Geneva--which noted its risk of being politicized by continuing cooperation with the USG under Plan Colombia. The ICRC is currently continuing a somewhat smaller version of the project, using its own funds.

The **Georgetown University/Javiariana University** Project was beset by delays and other problems from the start. The GOC's official endorsement of the project (September 1999) was never followed up by a GOC "call-forward" for assistance from Javiariana. The project's nominal GOC counterpart (the Minister of Interior) held the project at arm's length for over six months before resigning his post. At about the same time, Javiariana's own project director left the university to accept a cabinet position. Subsequent attempts by Javiariana to fashion a role for itself in support of their erstwhile colleague's efforts (the former project director had been designated as the president's personal envoy to the

peace process) failed. OTI and Javiariana eventually agreed to change the focus of the project to enlist civil society in the peace process; but those efforts also failed to produce any lasting results. The project ended in July, 2001.

While OTI's "Phase I" projects produced mixed results in terms of their explicit objectives, they did have a significant, longer-term impact on other elements of the USAID assistance program in Colombia. The Salesian Missions and ICRC projects, for example, were:

- The first instance in which an element of the USG (OTI) specifically identified internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a key target group for US attention in Colombia.
- A demonstration that IDPs could be reached, and their critical needs addressed, by intermediary institutions responsible for the implementation of USG-funded activities.
- A demonstration that US-funded intermediary institutions could work in conflicted areas of the country.
- The first instance in which an element of the USG (OTI) specifically identified the issue of child combatants in Colombia, and undertook a program to address some of the root causes of the issue.
- A valuable demonstration--to the US, Colombian and international community--that USG interests in Colombia had a "human face", that went beyond a focus on coca/poppy eradication and military solutions to Colombia's narcotics-driven civil strife.
- A demonstration that indigenous and international NGOs having their own institutional cultures, values and operating systems could work constructively with USAID in the pursuit of USG policy objectives in conflicted areas of the country.

The Georgetown/Javiariana project was, by most objective criteria, a failed effort--not so much as a result of its own mis-steps, but because the circumstances surrounding the project changed dramatically during its implementation. Most notable among those changed circumstances was a greatly diminished interest by either party in seeking a negotiated end to the armed conflict. Certainly, the project's prospects had appeared brighter in 1999, when the GOC was aggressively pursuing a peace agenda, and when the FARC appeared to be a willing partner in the search for a negotiated settlement. In retrospect, and in that context, OTI would have defaulted on one of its critical missions and mandates if it had *not* attempted to bolster that peace process.

Phase II

“Phase II” refers to the period during which a second “package” of projects was developed by OTI, after OTI had established an in-country presence in Colombia. These include:

Project: “Strengthening Peace Through Civil Society Initiatives at the Community Level”

Grantee: International Organization for Migration--IOM

Implementation arrangement:

Designed, funded and managed by OTI.

Project: “Colombia Former Child Soldier Reintegration Program”

Grantee: IOM

Implementation arrangement:

Designed by OTI; managed by OTI during its early (i.e., current) phase of operations; funded from the International Law and Narcotics (ILN) account.

Project: “Addressing the Needs of Internally Displaced Persons”--IDPS

Grantees: Pan American Development Foundation, UNICEF, World Vision, IOM and PROFAMILIA

Implementation arrangement:

Designed by OTI; initially managed by OTI; transferred to AID/Colombia management (as SO-3) in early 2001.

The “**Strengthening Peace Through Civil Society Initiatives at the Community Level**” project with IOM (September 2000-September 2002. Value: \$1.5 million) represented, at least in part, an opportunity to reinvigorate the “civil society” objective which OTI developed during in 1998, but which they did not pursue under Phase I. The project also reflected OTI’s readiness to continue its community-based peace strategy after ICRC/Geneva declined to continue its involvement with USAID. The project differed significantly from OTI’s other community-based activities (the ICRC and Salesian Missions projects) in that it included a focus on development of the participating NGOs themselves. These were often smaller, more innovative organizations that tended to get overlooked by international donors, but which had the imagination and flexibility to develop creative--sometimes provocative--new ways to get community groups involved in the peace process. OTI was able to launch this new activity--its “Small Peace Grants” project--despite a growing sense within USAID/Colombia that OTI’s work in the

country was essentially completed by the beginning of 2000. These perceptions were strengthened by negative feelings among Mission personnel who felt that OTI had been insufficiently cooperative with other elements of USAID during 1998-2000. The project fashioned by OTI was nonetheless sufficiently attractive that it was able to overcome the Mission's resistance to a further expansion of the OTI/Colombia program.

Somewhere between 3000-7000 children are members--voluntary and otherwise--of Colombian guerilla organizations. OTI designed the **"Colombia Former Child Soldier Reintegration Program" with IOM** (March 2001-February 2003. Value: \$2.5 million) in response to an earmark in the FY 2001 supplemental legislation which funded the USG-assisted portion of Plan Colombia. Although the earmarked funds were originally to be disbursed to the International Labor Organization of the United Nations, OTI successfully sought the opportunity to design and manage the new project on behalf of USAID/Colombia--which welcomed OTI's readiness to develop the initiative. OTI pursued this opportunity because it would have drawn on OTI's extensive similar experience in other countries--including the personal experience of OTI's country representative, who had worked on similar initiatives in Guatemala and Angola before joining OTI. As designed by an OTI team which visited Colombia in October 2000, the project aims to significantly strengthen the GOC's capacity to receive, counsel, rehabilitate and reintegrate former child combatants into Colombian society; to clarify their legal status; and to prepare a practical plan for the management of a large number of young ex-combatants in the event of a major demobilization. The project's major counterpart agency is the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, known by his Spanish initials ICBF.

Colombia has one of the highest rates of forced internal displacement in the world. By 2001, approximately 1.5 million persons had left their homes, farms and livelihoods in the country's conflicted areas, and had sought refuge in cities and municipalities. Not surprisingly, both OTI and USAID had identified the IDP issue as a key element of their respective programs when OTI and USAID undertook joint assessment visits to Colombia in 1998. The specific impetus for OTI's design work on the USAID Mission's program to **Address the Needs of Internally Displaced Persons** was an instruction from the new Mission Director, who arrived in-country in January 2000, and who determined that the OTI country representative would function as a fully-integrated member of the Mission workforce. The Mission Director's enlistment of the OTI representative for this design task was driven in part by the mission's severe personnel shortage at the time, as well as by the Director's recognition that the OTI representative's other-country experience was relevant to the assignment.

Phase II: Performance and Impact

By the end of December 2001, IOM will have identified the last of the 24 subprojects it is funding/will fund under its **“Strengthening Peace Through Civil Society Initiatives at the Community Level” project**. The final year of the project will be devoted to the implementation of these activities (typically six months to one year in duration, each subproject funded at the level of \$50,000 or less). The subprojects themselves range from the unconventional and provocative (work with street gangs, former guerillas, urban “muralists”, alternative media, etc.) to collaborative relations with municipal governments, departmental Peace Commissions, the development of websites for journalists, and civic education/vocational training for marginalized groups such as Afro-Colombian youth. The USAID Mission is ambivalent about the project--citing, for example, the relatively insignificant “footprint” left by its small number of small-scale activities. But the Mission also intends to assume responsibility--under its larger and almost identical “Peace Grants Project”--for some of the initiatives launched under the OTI project. Indeed, the Peace Grants Project itself was modeled in many ways on the smaller OTI project, and is implemented by the same grantee (IOM). IOM itself acknowledges the difficulty involved in trying to assess the impact of programs designed to affect peoples’ attitudes and ultimately, behavior, especially over the short term. Some of those results may not be evident for years, and even then will probably not be credited to the project. That said, some of the more obvious results of the project appear to include:

- The identification of IOM as a valuable working partner for USAID/C (IOM currently manages four USAID-funded grants), and the development of the *modus operandi* between IOM and USAID for management of those programs.
- Development of a model for the Mission’s larger Peace Grants Project
- A likely positive impact on the attitudes of project beneficiaries toward peace, the value of civil discourse in resolving differences, and the capacity of citizens’ organizations to influence public policy.
- Development of selected interventions which are advancing broader US policy interests in Colombia (truth in media, improved governance at local levels)

The **Colombia Former Child Soldiers Reintegration Program with IOM** has already achieved two of its end-of-project objectives, namely its receipt and care of approximately 200 ex-combatants at the project’s specialized treatment centers, and the opening of three additional reception/treatment centers. OTI and IOM agree that the project’s early attainment of its sub-goal of 200 ex-combatants indicates that the initial target was set too low, and should be increased. (The project’s other sub-goal is to receive and attend to the needs of up to 600 young ex-combatants who might enter the ICBF system as a result of accelerated and/or unexpected release events). OTI and IOM

are urging ICBF to participate more earnestly in efforts to develop community and family-based networks (halfway houses, job training and placement, family placement, legal assistance, etc.) to support the ex-combatants once they leave the ICBF system.

The OTI country representative is gradually turning over management responsibility for this project to USAID/C, which will assume full responsibility for the activity in January 2002.

USAID/Colombia relied on OTI to design--and to initially manage--the Mission's program to **Address the Needs of Displaced Persons** in Colombia. OTI's role in this instance was to develop an overall framework for the program, to work through its legal and procurement processes, and to have the program "package" ready for funding once ILN funds were allotted to the Mission. The OTI country representative completed all of these tasks, to the extent that the Mission was able to execute all five grants under the program within 24 hours of the receipt of program funds in September, 2001.

An important, if unintended consequence of OTI's work in developing the Child Combatants and IDP programs was a rehabilitation, of sorts, for OTI in the eyes of the Mission and LAC Bureau. OTI's cooperativeness and professionalism in developing the two initiatives helped reverse much of the Mission's resentment over OTI's previous aloofness and refusal (in the Mission's view) to be a team player in Colombia.

I. BACKGROUND

Colombia has been at war with itself for much of the past 50 years. During the period 1948-1958, (*La Violencia*) the country was wracked by civil war between supporters of the Liberal and Conservative parties. An estimated 200,000 people lost their lives in that conflict. *La Violencia* ended when the two parties agreed to a ceasefire and a far-reaching administrative and political power-sharing agreement that lasted for the next 16 years--a period known as the National Front. That arrangement brought a measure of peace and stability to Colombia until the National Front collapsed in 1974--weakened by the internal fragmentation of the traditional political parties, increasing lawlessness and intimidation by organized crime, and the emergence of armed guerilla groups. The security situation deteriorated further during the 1980s in the context of a fast-growing illegal drug economy.

Several Colombian administrations subsequently attempted to address the worsening political, economic and security situation. Belisario Betancourt (1982-86) initiated peace negotiations with the various guerilla groups, including the *Fuerzas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), offering conditional amnesties and the release of prisoners in exchange for a cease-fire. Those talks ended in November 1985 when the M-19 assaulted the National Palace of Justice in the heart of Bogota, taking 300 persons hostage, including the entire High Court of Justice. The ensuing battle for the building left about 100 persons dead, including almost all of the M-19 guerillas and eleven supreme court justices.

Subsequent administrations nonetheless continued the peace process. Virgilio Barco (1986-90) and Cesar Gaviria (1990-94) successfully negotiated the demobilization and disarming of eight guerilla groups, with a combined total of 4000 members. Among these were M-19, Quintain Lame (formed by members of Indian communities, but co-opted by the FARC), and the Maoist EPL. Their members were reincorporated into Colombian society, while some of the former guerilla groups transformed themselves into legal political parties and competed in local, departmental and national elections. A political result of the peace process was the writing, in 1991, of a new constitution which modernized the state's governing apparatus at national, departmental and local levels. Despite these changes, the FARC and the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN) continued their armed struggle.

Throughout this period the United States Government repeatedly stressed its position that Colombia's efforts to combat drug-related activities were closely related to US national interests--and most obviously to US efforts to curb the import of illicit drugs in the US. The USG underscored its resolve by providing significant assistance to Colombian police and intelligence agencies to improve their effectiveness in the fight against the country's drug cartels. This cooperation led to the relatively successful breakup of drug cartels in Medellin (1991-93) and Cali (1994-95).

US-Colombia cooperation in the war on drugs--and US-Colombia bilateral relations in general-- diminished significantly during the administration of Ernesto Samper (1994-98), whose alleged ties to the Colombian narcotics sector undermined US confidence in his role as a partner in the anti-drugs campaign. Unfortunately, this period of relative disengagement coincided with an increase in the strength and intransigence of the FARC and the ELN, both of which increasingly involved themselves in the lucrative narcotics sector. Their brutal assaults on hamlets and villages, kidnappings, massacres and other acts of terror exasperated local populations--and contributed in some important respects to the emergence of paramilitary forces which themselves drew financial support from the narcotics sector.

In 1998 Andres Pastrana campaigned successfully for the presidency of Colombia on a platform calling for renewed peace negotiations with the guerilla and for a far more vigorous campaign against the growing, processing and exporting of illicit drugs. Importantly, he linked these initiatives to a call for the development of alternatives to coca production for the country's rural population, and for the modernization of the Colombian armed forces, with special attention to a strengthening of their respect for and protection of human rights. The USG saw Pastrana's election as an important new opportunity to further USG longstanding policy interests in Colombia, and indeed to broadening its policy agenda beyond narcotics eradication to include alternative development, enhancement of human rights initiatives, and support for the peace process.

Pastrana was elected to the presidency in May, 1998. On July 2, 1998 an Inter-Agency Working Group (IWG) chaired by the National Security Council tasked USAID with preparing a proposal to support Colombian alternative development efforts as part of an overall counter-narcotics strategy and a proposal to strengthen the protection of human rights as part of a process to end the violence in Colombia. In August and September of that year, representatives of BHR/OTI and the LAC Bureau visited Colombia to assess the prospects for a USAID response to the Working Group's instruction. USAID planners generally understood at the time that up to 18 months would be needed to ramp up the planning, funding and implementation of a long-term assistance program (i.e. what would eventually emerge as the USG portion of Plan Colombia). The Agency therefore sought to develop a more immediate, interim response--the OTI component--that would help support the new Colombian government's nascent peace process, while also demonstrating the USG's readiness to help Colombia confront its larger security, developmental and human rights issues.

An important consideration in USAID planning was Pastrana's announcement, at his August 7, 1998 inauguration, that his new administration and the guerillas would initiate a *despeje*, (literally, "clearing a space", or "disoccupation") of five municipalities controlled by the insurgents in two departments--San Vicente del Caguan in the department of Caqueta, and Vista Hermosa, Mesetas, La Macarena and Uribe in the department of Meta. Both the government and the guerillas declared their intentions to use the *despeje*/demilitarized zone as municipal "peace laboratories", where a community

dialogue among national and local officials, armed combatants, civil society and the community would take place in an environment of peace. While the precise agenda for this dialogue was not made clear at the time by any of the parties to the agreement, their apparent readiness to enter substantive negotiations fueled considerable optimism in the country that peace might be within reach. USAID shared this view at the time; and OTI was encouraged to develop initiatives that would support the peace process at both the national and *despeje* levels.

II. INITIAL ACTIVITIES: October-December, 1998

OTI's assessment visits to Colombia during July-October of 1998 identified three potential "openings" for OTI assistance. At the *national* level, these included: 1) provision of assistance to the GOC's High Commission for Peace to help the High Commission conceptualize various options for its peace negotiation agenda with the insurgent groups; and 2) support for activities by civil society (including the Catholic Church, labor unions, trade and business associations, international organizations, "populist" organizations including peasants' and indigenous unions, etc.) to exert constructive pressure on the GOC and insurgents to maintain negotiations. At the *community* level, the intention was to address the extreme marginality of Colombia's rural areas, where lack of public and private investment, and bleak economic prospects for these regions' citizens contributed to the country's endemic violence.

The initial focal point of the community-based 'opening' was the *despeje*, where OTI proposed to undertake five projects. The first two of these--an activity to strengthen municipal development in San Vicente del Caguan, and a workshop on "Sustainable Development and Peace in the Ariari Region"--were scheduled to begin in mid-October, 1998. The only activity to be implemented was the development workshop for the Ariari Region. None of the other four activities took place--primarily because they would have, in the view of the NSC, facilitated direct engagement with the FARC in the selection and implementation of community-level activities. The activities were therefore considered to be inconsistent with USG policy prohibiting any actions which might directly or indirectly enhance the role or status of the guerilla factions.

As noted, the OTI-funded workshop on "Sustainable Development and Peace in the Ariari Region" did take place, on October 22-23 in Bogotá. Facilitated by Javieriana University, the session brought together 42 participants, including the mayors of four of the five *despeje* municipalities, representatives of civil society (including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the National Reconciliation Commission and the Catholic Episcopal Conference), the High Commissioner of Peace, the Director of PLANTE (the GOC agency responsible for alternative development), and some participants nominally representing *campesino* associations, but assumed by some to be affiliated with the FARC. A key purpose of the workshop was to develop community-level projects that would be attractive to various donor agencies; indeed, an OTI-proposed follow-up conference was to have presented these project designs to representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and various bilateral and multi-national donors. The LAC Bureau declined to approve the follow-up conference, again citing concerns over the potential participation of guerilla elements in any activities that might emerge from the second workshop. On the surface, then, this first OTI activity in Colombia produced little if any obvious results. On the other hand, the workshop did provide Bogotá-based decision makers with a rare--and for many, their first-- opportunity to hear directly from local-level leaders about rural communities' needs and priorities.

These local level leaders, and especially the five mayors, had been assigned important roles in the peace process by the High Commissioner for Peace; but prior to this workshop there had been virtually no discussion among the mayors and the High Commissioner as to how those roles would be played out. OTI support for the workshop was clearly consistent with its mandate to promote and facilitate such a dialogue in the search for peace.

By the end of 1998, some parameters for OTI's role in Colombia had become clear. First, no field activities were to take place inside the *despeje*. Instead, OTI would look for opportunities in other marginalized, conflicted areas, preferably close to the demilitarized zone. As the year drew to a close, OTI initiated discussions with the Salesian Missions to develop such community level activities, the objective of which would be to "empower communities affected by conflict to participate in democratic processes". More specifically, it was hoped that local level activities would advance the peace process by "1) restoring confidence in the government by providing municipal-level services to neglected communities; and 2) helping local governments and communities identify and implement social and productive projects that respond to citizens' needs" (OTI Biweekly Report, 9/99).

Second, the OTI/Colombia program manager had concluded by the end of the year that the civil society "opening" was not likely to be a productive investment for OTI. OTI had initially identified this element as a promising candidate for OTI involvement largely because civil society had played a major role in a 1997 plebiscite wherein 10-12 million Colombian voters called for substantive peace negotiations. The OTI program manager was not able, however, to reach agreement with any specific NGO or group of civil society partners to develop a meaningful advocacy effort in support of the peace process. OTI's preliminary discussions with prospective civil society partners appear to have broken down over the potential partners' unreasonable demands for resources, coupled with their close and often jealous attention to the funding requests of other potential partners.

As OTI entered 1999, it had sponsored the Bogotá workshop on development and peace in the Ariari region, had essentially jettisoned the civil society opening, and was poised to develop a community-level initiative(s) with the Salesian Missions and other appropriate partner(s). Although OTI had been closely monitoring the work of the GOC High Commissioner for Peace throughout the July-December period, it did not yet have any serious plans (or GOC request) in hand for work in support of the negotiation process.

III. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION: Phase I

A. Background

Phase I of the OTI/Colombia program took shape during the summer-autumn of 1998, as the product of a series of consultations between the OTI/Washington-based program manager and various contacts in Colombia. The three projects that emerged from these discussions reflected two broad themes: 1) empowerment of local communities to give them a stake in peace and democracy; and 2) support for the Government of Colombia's (GOC) negotiation process with the armed opposition. The three projects were as follows:

Community-based activities:

Project: "Emergency Response to the Conflict Zone in Meta"
Grantee: Salesian Missions, Arlington, VA (on behalf of the Diocese of Ariari, Meta)

Project: "ICRC 'Peace Fund'"
Grantee: International Committee of the Red Cross, Bogotá, Colombia

Support for the National-level Negotiation Process:

Project: "Technical Study Groups on the Issues of the Colombian Peace Process Agenda"

Grantee: Georgetown University, Washington, DC; sub grantee: Javiariana University, Bogotá, Colombia

B. Description and Assessment, Phase I

i. Community-Based Projects

- a) *"Responding to the Emergency in the Conflict Zone of Colombia (Diocese of Ariari, Meta)": Salesian Missions.*

Background and Description: OTI signed its first grant agreement in Colombia with the Salesian Missions in January, 1999. The objective of the one-year, \$251,000 project (later amended to \$314,456, including a no-cost extension to the end of December, 2001) was to "support the efforts of the Diocese of Ariari and the Church to work with those communities greatly affected by the conflict to identify and implement projects that respond to the communities' immediate needs". The project was designed to work in communities that were outside of, but bordered, the FARC-controlled *desjeje*, and

specifically with communities which received the bulk of the displaced population fleeing from the *despeje* itself. In order to promote the sustainability of the project, the Salesian Missions agreed to establish the “Fundacion Ariari”, which would seek to mobilize non-USG resources to facilitate development work in the region--much of it to be financed by micro-credit loans. Finally, the project included funds for the provision of “agricultural scholarships” for boys and girls of the Ariari region--a program that would offer young people an alternative to recruitment into the guerilla.

OTI’s decision to support this project in this particular area was not, evidently, a direct consequence of the October, 1998 workshop which focused on the needs of the Ariari region. Rather, OTI’s commitment to the activity emerged in the course of several personal contacts and communications between the Bishop of Ariari, Msgr. Hector Lopez, and the OTI program manager--who concluded that Msgr. Lopez had both the vision and the capacity to “champion” a key part of the OTI agenda in Colombia. The OTI manager also recognized that any effective OTI partner in such sensitive areas would have to be perceived as non-threatening to the FARC, and credible to the beneficiary population. The Catholic Church, represented in this instance by the Salesians, enjoyed such standing on both sides of the demilitarized zone. The Salesians had worked in the area for over a century, providing basic education and health services to poorer communities in the region.

As originally conceived, most of the activities to be funded under the project were to be very small (average cost: \$3000) infrastructure projects--e.g., classrooms, school kitchens, community centers, libraries, etc., generally referred to as “social” projects by the grantee. Within a fairly short period of time, however, the Salesian Missions concluded that the project should strengthen its emphasis on efforts to improve the productive, income-earning capacity of persons who were displaced from the *despeje* into the project area. Thus, the project’s micro-credit component and its associated revolving fund--originally intended to be small parts of the project--became its dominant elements. This change in project orientation was effected without any disruption or delays, owing to OTI’s flexibility and more-or-less typical avoidance of “over-design” in its project agreements.

Performance: The Salesian Missions offices in Bogotá and Washington are preparing a final project report, so extensive performance data will not be repeated in this document. To summarize, however, as of November, 2001 the Salesians had completed a total of 14 “social” projects; awarded 343 scholarships to students attending eight Salesian training facilities in the Meta region; had created the revolving credit fund, and approved 326 loans benefiting more than 1,460 families.

Throughout its duration, the project generally moved slower than had been anticipated by both OTI and the grantee, with much of the delay due to the difficult field environment and occasional security problems. Two of the project’s target areas, for example, had been the scenes of fierce battles between the army and guerilla units. Moreover, routine

monitoring of the project by OTI staff was not possible due to the security situation, leaving OTI to depend almost entirely on grantee reporting for a sense of the project's performance. That reporting was, in the view of the resident OTI representative, inadequate to allow meaningful project oversight by OTI. Similarly, the grantee's financial reporting was often late, inaccurate or both. The OTI representative alerted the grantee regarding his concerns several times, albeit without any subsequent improvements in the grantee's financial or performance reporting.

Perhaps more troubling to OTI were its observations--during the OTI representative's infrequent visits--that the majority of children benefiting from project-funded scholarships had in fact been enrolled at participating training institutions well before the beginning of the project, and had not, therefore, been newly "rescued" from the *despeje*, as claimed by the grantee. There were indications, moreover, that some lenders' participation in the micro-credit program might have been due to their active role in the Church and/or their personal relationships with grantee staff. (It should be noted, however, that these relationships did not appear to have any effect on the viability of the project's loan fund; indeed, the grantee reports that the percentage of bad loans did not exceed 2.5% of the project's loan portfolio.).

In general, then, OTI's regard for the project was somewhat mixed. On one hand, OTI was growing increasingly frustrated with the project's pace and responsiveness. Yet the activity had clearly played an important role in shaping not only OTI's own strategic approach in Colombia, but it had provided some key lessons as well for the larger USAID program that was then taking shape in Colombia (see below). Given its ambivalence regarding the project, OTI decided to essentially allow the activity to run its course, and to end on schedule in April, 2001. A no-cost extension to the end of December 2001 was granted to give the grantee time to effect an orderly closeout and to prepare a final project report.

Impact: From USAID's normal perspective, a project's "impact" is a measure of the breadth and depth of positive changes it brought to people's lives, and the likely durability of those changes. The OTI standard is of course different, and would ask if the activity contributed in any meaningful way to the advancement of peace in Colombia, or to the ability of local communities to restore some economic and/or social stability to citizens' lives in a strife-torn environment. Applying either of those standards to the Salesian Missions project reveals a mixed outcome. The several subprojects were very small, were spread over a fairly wide area, and reached a relatively small number of direct and indirect beneficiaries--even in the context of the low population densities which characterize Colombia's rural areas. At the level of individual families, however, the subprojects may have had a profoundly important effect. Perhaps most importantly, however, the Salesian Missions project introduced some major lessons into the USG's larger program effort in Colombia. These included:

- The first instance in which an element of the USG (OTI) specifically identified

internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a key target group for US attention in Colombia.

- A demonstration that IDPs could be reached, and their critical needs addressed, by intermediary institutions responsible for the implementation of USG-funded activities.
- A demonstration that US-funded intermediary institutions could work in conflicted areas of the country.
- The first instance in which an element of the USG (OTI) specifically identified the issue of child combatants in Colombia, and undertook a program to address some of the root causes of the issue.

Finally, the project--along with the other elements of OTI's Colombia program (discussed below)--demonstrated that credible, culturally-sensitive organizations (Salesian Missions, ICRC, International Organization for Migration, etc.) can offer a practical alternative to the SWIFT family of contractors in instances when OTI must quickly ramp up a program in areas not receptive (or hostile) to assistance provided by US-based organizations.

By way of an epilogue to the Salesian Missions project, it should be noted that the grantee has successfully sought follow-on assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to continue the Salesian Mission's work in Meta province, and to expand its three-part program (social projects, scholarships and micro-credit) to other conflicted areas in northern Colombia. Specifically, the Salesians expect to receive approximately \$1.5 million (equivalent) in excess USDA agricultural products by the end of 2001, and a similar amount in 2002. The Salesians intend to monetize these products to cover the costs of their ongoing program in the current and planned project areas.

b) *The "Peace Fund": International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)*

Background and Description: OTI signed an 18-month, \$750,000 grant agreement with the ICRC in March, 1999 where the ICRC agreed to manage a "Peace Fund" which the organization would use to finance "Quick Impact Projects" (QIP) in rural areas. Unlike the community-based project with the Salesian Missions--whose activities were focused in Meta province--ICRC project resources were made available for activities in conflicted areas throughout the country. All of ICRC's 17 "delegations" around the country were encouraged to develop, with local counterparts, sub-projects which would enhance the quality of life of people living in the country's rural communities. Another distinguishing feature of the ICRC activity was the grantee's decision to focus not on the kind of economic/income-generating subprojects eventually favored by the Salesian Missions, but rather on community infrastructure initiatives such as community centers, libraries, health posts, school buildings, etc. The ICRC's premise in adopting this emphasis was that such projects could serve as catalysts for community life--that they could help would-

be displaced persons decide *not* to move because they had a stake in their own community. Indeed, many ICRC personnel associated with the project believed that income-generating projects may have contributed to the displacement problem by creating certain “enticements” (or at least reduced economic hardship) for DPs in their destination communities.

The ICRC also differed with OTI over some key features of OTI’s community-based peace strategy. First, the ICRC did not consider the project to be related in any way with the peace process; it was, in their view, a humanitarian effort intended above all to improve the quality of life for poor citizens (including potential DP’s) in the country’s neglected rural communities. Second, the ICRC did not agree to undertake any activities designed to, in OTI terms, “(restore) confidence in the government by providing municipal-level services to neglected communities”. Such an approach would have, in the ICRC’s view, severely undercut the organization’s excellent credibility in and access to its potential partners in the target communities. (OTI did not press ICRC on this point, since the ICRC’s almost-unique access, coverage and credibility were primary factors in OTI’s decision to seek a partnership with ICRC in the first place). Finally, the ICRC found some of OTI’s ground rules for the project to be, in the words of the current ICRC/Colombia Representative, “shocking”, and incompatible with ICRC methodology, principles and values. These included USAID’s insistence that no project-related work take place inside the *despeje*; that no contact be made with the guerilla factions; and that the ICRC needed to screen potential project beneficiaries to ensure that none of them had any affiliation with any guerilla faction.

In practice, virtually all of these OTI-USAID concerns got worked out without the necessity of formal challenges or extended negotiations. For the record, the ICRC did not undertake any projects that might enhance the image or role of the government--but their cooperation with municipal and departmental authorities on water projects, school and health clinic construction, recreation areas, etc. did in fact attract sometimes significant government counterpart funding, along with the introduction of additional government presence (i.e., personnel) at the schools and health facilities constructed under the project. Similarly, no project-funded activities inside the *despeje* were ever proposed by the ICRC, even if the organization never explicitly accepted such a limitation. The guerilla factions were never consulted re project possibilities--even if ICRC delegates did from time to time seek assurances from the guerilla would it not destroy a project-funded activity (e.g., school, clinic, community center) if it were built. And despite the ICRC’s initial reluctance to support activities for displaced persons, or for income-generating initiatives, the project eventually included several examples of each--reflecting the organization’s deference to the proposals it received from its delegates in the countryside.

As the project neared its end-date, USAID/Colombia offered an additional \$1.5 million to ICRC to extend the project for an additional year, and to extend its activities into urban, as well as rural areas. ICRC/Geneva declined to draw on Plan Colombia funds, however, noting its reluctance to be too-closely associated with USG policy in Colombia. OTI did

not propose that the project be continued with OTI (i.e., non-Plan Colombia) funds, and the project ended on schedule in September 2000.

Performance: The “Peace Fund” was generally successful in completing a large number of activities during its brief (March, 1999- September, 2000) time period. By the end of the project it has completed a total of 54 community development and income-generating grants which benefited, by the ICRC’s calculations, over 120,000 people directly and indirectly. Moreover, the project had leveraged some \$510,000 in counterpart funding (cash and in-kind) from participating communities and various local/national government entities. The ICRC achieved these results despite having been evicted from its Bogotá headquarters in December 1999 by several displaced persons who took up residence in the building--and who were still there as of November, 2001. Perhaps the most notable indicator of the project’s success was ICRC’s decision to continue the activity--albeit under its own operating norms, and at about 50% of the funding provided under the OTI grant. ICRC’s version of the project continues to this day.

Impact: The ICRC project illustrates many of the achievements and limitations of the Salesian Missions project, as discussed above. Its impact, spread over dozens of small activities in many parts of the country, was most apparent at the community and family levels, rather than in terms of its impact on either the peace process or in its promotion of democracy and stability in conflicted areas of the country. Like the Salesian Missions project, however, the ICRC activity does appear to have played an important demonstration role for the USAID/Colombia Mission as the latter refined its own implementation methodology for the US portion of Plan Colombia. These lessons, many of them shared with the Salesian project, included demonstrations that:

- The USG needed to include a “human” element in a program (Plan Colombia) which was generally perceived (in Colombia and on Capitol Hill) as including an over-emphasis on coca/poppy eradication and military solutions to Colombia’s narcotics-driven civil strife. While USAID/Colombia does not acknowledge that the Salesian Missions or ICRC projects were laboratories for elements of USAID/Colombia’s current program, it should be noted that the Mission’s SO-1 (Democracy and Governance) includes a \$2.7 million “Peace Fund” fashioned loosely on the OTI initiative, as well as on OTI’s later “Small Grants Peace Fund” with the International Organization for Migration.
- Like the Salesian Missions project, the ICRC activity raised the visibility and awareness level of the IDP issue within USAID, and tested a variety of approaches to address the needs of the displaced population.
- An international NGO having its own institutional culture, values and operating systems could work constructively with USAID in the pursuit of shared objectives in conflicted areas of the country.

ii. **Support for the National-Level Peace Process:** “*Project to Structure ‘Technical Study Groups’ About the Issues of the Colombian Peace Process Negotiation Agenda*”

Background and Description: In January, 2000 OTI signed an 18-month (Jan. 2000-July 2001), \$195,625 agreement with Georgetown University, whereby Georgetown was to collaborate with Javiariana University of Bogotá to support President Pastrana’s negotiation process with the armed guerilla, and especially with the FARC. In many respects, this project had begun to take shape almost two years earlier--and had its origins in Javiariana’s earlier attempt to support the new president’s overtures to the ELN.

President Pastrana took office in August, 1998 in the context of widespread optimism that peace was at hand. His overtures to the ELN and FARC had been constructively received by both armed groups; and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace was headed by a respected member of the president’s inner-circle. The president and the High Commissioner decided that their initial focus of peace negotiations would be with the ELN. The High Commissioner recognized, however, that the GOC’s negotiation agenda lacked substance and consistency, without which his team would not be able to propose specific solutions to the conflict. Largely on the basis of personal relationships between the High Commissioner and senior faculty at Javiariana, the latter agreed to informally help the High Commissioner develop GOC negotiating positions, primarily by undertaking a series of studies into key issues related to the conflict. The studies were to be short, concise and specific in terms of their recommendations to the High Commissioner’s negotiating team. Javiariana’s initial intention was to conduct three such studies, focusing on 1) international human rights; 2) the rights of belligerents and prisoners of war; and 3) protection of natural resources (prompted by the ELN’s practice of sabotaging pipelines and utility towers).

Negotiations between the High Commissioner and the ELN broke down in February, 1999 as a result of the GOC’s refusal to designate a *despeje* north of Bogotá for the ELN. In April of that year, the GOC and the FARC created their own preliminary agenda for peace negotiations. It included reference to, *inter alia*, 12 negotiation “themes” which would be further developed by so-called “thematic committees”. Once again, Javiariana offered to assist the High Commissioner’s negotiating team by helping to develop GOC negotiation positions around the 12 themes.

The OTI country program manager had been in continuous if informal contact with Javiariana personnel since the beginnings of the failed GOC-ELN initiative. Now, a year later, the prospect of meaningful negotiations between the GOC and the FARC--a process which could build upon the lessons of the earlier failed effort with the ELN--led the OTI representative and his Javiariana counterparts to conclude that Javiariana could play a major role in facilitating the success of the GOC-FARC negotiation process. Javiariana submitted its formal request for support to OTI in July, 1999. OTI sought assurances that Javiariana’s participation in the process would indeed be welcomed by the Ministry of

Interior (nominally in charge of the High Commissioner's Office), and urged Javiariana to secure a formal request from the MOI for Javiariana's assistance. That request was confirmed in a MOI letter dated September 13, 1999.

The cooperative agreement which OTI eventually executed in January, 2000 engaged Georgetown University as the grantee of record, and Javiariana University as a sub-grantee to Georgetown. On one hand, OTI's reason for involving Georgetown in the project was the latter's familiarity with Colombia--and with USAID--by virtue of the GU Center for Latin American Studies' longstanding cooperative agreement with the Agency's LAC Bureau. GU's familiarity with USAID financial management and reporting requirements (vs. Javiariana's inexperience in these areas) led OTI to conclude that it could avoid accountability-related distractions in the project by positioning GU as the grantee of record. In practice, however, GU had virtually no operational role in the project.

Performance: The project immediately encountered major problems. Project startup was delayed repeatedly on instructions from the Minister of Interior, who noted that the peace process had not yet started. Finally, after six months of such delays, the Interior Minister resigned from government, never having authorized a go-ahead for the project. Further complicating the situation, Javiariana's project director for the activity (Augusto Ramirez Ocampo) was named Minister of Development--producing a situation whereby both the project's nominal GOC counterpart and its senior project manager both stepped from the scene at about the same time (June, 2000).

Javiariana replaced Augusto Ocampo with another senior faculty member, Ernesto Borda, who had been involved in the project since its beginning. Over the next several months Javiariana continued to seek a substantive role for itself along the lines of the project design, i.e., to develop GOC negotiating points for peace talks with the FARC. The GOC, however, never called on Javiariana to play such a role; and GOC-FARC negotiations by this time were stalled anyway, seeming to obviate the usefulness of the project.. By December, 2000--a little less than a year after the project was launched--it appeared to be effectively over.

OTI and Javiariana tried to breath new life into the activity by redirecting its focus. Javiariana would henceforth work with the Minister of Development (Ocampo), whom President Pastrana had designated to be his personal envoy to the peace process, to help Ocampo draw in different sectors of civil society as advocates for and stakeholders in a peace plan. The intention was to enlist the oil industry, power companies, transport agencies, NGOs, private industry, etc. as advisors to the peace process, and possibly as investors in peace-related initiatives. Javiariana was in fact able to convene six such sectoral meetings over the next several months, and submitted a series of sectoral reports to the President through the Minister of Development. The effort, however, did not seem to capture the GOC's attention with any more success than had Javiariana's earlier efforts to inform the negotiation process. As the project neared its July, 2001 end-date,

Javiariana proposed to OTI that the activity be extended, i.e., to give it another opportunity to realize its objectives. OTI declined, noting the several factors that had impeded the project's success--and which would likely continue to do so (including the project's frequent changes in GOC counterparts, apparent lack of GOC interest, and most notably, the effective collapse of the peace process itself). The project ended as originally scheduled, in July, 2001.

Impact: On the surface, this project would appear to have been a failure. Its role in support of peace negotiations was negligible; the GOC was apparently never serious in its stated intention to draw upon Javiariana's help; and toward the end, the project appeared to be engaged in an unseemly quest for some/any role to play in the peace process. That assessment, however, has benefit of hindsight; at the time the project was designed, it was probably the right thing to do.

In 1999 the guerilla was winning. The GOC's response was the creation of a two track approach consisting of 1) negotiations with the guerilla, and 2) a deterrence strategy. The first track required a substantive negotiation agenda; the second called for a strengthened military and, hopefully, success on the battlefield. During the intervening period the guerilla has grown weaker, while the GOC military has grown stronger (with more improvements in the pipeline). As 2001 comes to a close, neither party embraces its original incentive to negotiate, such that the prospect for substantive peace talks is currently near-nil. This situation could not have been forecast in 1999, however. And indeed, had OTI *not* attempted to bolster the peace process at the time, it would have defaulted on one of its critical missions and mandates. In short, the project failed, but the attempt itself was both appropriate and necessary--or put differently, the project did not so much fail as it was overtaken by changed circumstances.

Finally, those changing circumstances in Colombia serve as a useful reminder that conditions in that country may change again--to the extent that the GOC and the guerilla might once again seek a negotiated solution to the armed conflict (e.g., when the FARC, like the M-19 before it, comes to view a negotiated settlement as the only viable survival strategy). If and when that day arrives, the body of experience which OTI and Javiariana have assembled may once again be brought to bear, possibly with more lasting effect.

IV. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION: PHASE II

A. Background

The OTI/Colombia representative (David Gould) arrived in country in January 2000. For the next three months Gould overlapped with the OTI/Washington-based Colombia program manager, Robert Kramer, while the two effected a gradual transfer of day-to-day responsibilities for the country program. Prior to the Gould's arrival, however, the new USAID/Colombia Mission Director (George Wachtenheim) had announced his intention to reorganize the staffing and reporting structure of what was to be a significantly enlarged USAID Mission. As part of that restructuring, the new Mission Director determined that the OTI country representative would report to and through Mission management--as well as directly to OTI/Washington--and that the OTI representative would, in addition to working on his OTI-specific tasks, also assist the Mission in the development of key elements of the emerging Plan Colombia. Specifically, the OTI representative was tasked with developing the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) component of the Mission's nascent program.

It should be pointed out that the Mission Director's decision to more fully incorporate OTI into the Mission's "normal" structure was due at least in part to growing concerns within the LAC Bureau and in USAID/C regarding the independence with which the original OTI program manager exercised his responsibilities. These concerns, which began to emerge even during the 1998 design phase of the OTI/Colombia program, focused on the OTI program manager's apparent reluctance to adequately review or clear OTI initiatives with either the LAC Bureau or Mission leadership, as well as with his reluctance to share information regarding country-level counterparts, discussions with them, or any findings which might help inform the development of the Mission's larger bilateral program. (These same LAC Bureau and Mission personnel acknowledge that the OTI program manager's in-depth familiarity with Colombia enabled OTI to develop a country program quickly--as OTI was tasked to do. But the subsequent lack of meaningful dialogue on OTI interventions led some to note that they could not determine the objective utility of the OTI program design *versus*, for example, the extent to which it might reflect the personal biases of the program's designers).

Meanwhile, personnel changes in OTI/Washington were to have their own impact on the program's direction in Colombia, and on the Agency's perceptions of OTI relevance and usefulness. As noted above, OTI's Washington-based Colombia program manager was replaced in early 1990. OTI's new Latin America Team Leader (Russell Porter) recognized the need to engage colleagues elsewhere in the Agency and in the Mission, and to ensure these parties' support for OTI initiatives prior to their launch. Importantly, his efforts to explain and promote OTI's role to other-bureau and Mission colleagues, and to make the necessary accommodations to their concerns (see preceding paragraphs) led many of these partners to re-think their hostility to OTI. Indeed, it is probably not an

over-statement to suggest that this changed management style--marked most notably by increased communication and consultation with agency partners--went very far toward "rehabilitating" OTI in the eyes of other managers responsible for the overall USAID program in Colombia. This more positive view of OTI would be reinforced later by OTI/Washington's direct role in the development of the Former Child Combatants initiative (see below).

The OTI/Colombia program that emerged from these discussions was more closely-circumscribed in terms of its tasks and reporting channels. But the program was still fairly expansive in its scope--including responsibility as of January, 2000 for the management and oversight of the three ongoing 'Phase I' projects--one of which (the Georgetown/Javiariana activity) was just getting started. These projects were implemented as discussed above; eventually the ICRC "Peace Fund" project ended in September, 2000; the Georgetown/Javiariana project ended in July, 2001, and the Salesian Missions project will officially end in December of this year.

It should be recalled that OTI had by this time grown ambivalent with regard to two of these activities--the Salesian Missions project and the Georgetown/Javiariana project. OTI would have preferred to continue (and expand) the ICRC initiative, however, but had to end the project on schedule when ICRC/Geneva withdrew its support for an activity which was, in ICRC/Geneva's view, too closely linked to the politically-charged Plan Colombia. Rather than allowing a good idea to die, however, OTI later launched (September, 2000) a successor activity--a project with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) entitled "Strengthening Peace Through Civil Society Initiatives at the Community Level". Although the IOM project clearly had its roots in the "community empowerment" focus of the earlier ICRC activity, it also drew upon the premise of the civil society "opening" which had been identified, and discarded, 1998.

By late 2000, then, OTI had funded four projects in Colombia. These included the three 'Phase I' activities and the "Phase II" IOM project (eventually referred to as the "Small Peace Grants Project"). During Phase II, OTI was also to develop--on behalf of USAID/Colombia--two additional programs which utilized USAID-managed/State Department ILN (International Law and Narcotics) funds. These OTI-developed, ILN-funded programs include the previously-mentioned IDP activity, and an initiative to facilitate the reintegration of former child combatants into mainstream economic and social life in Colombia. (The IDP program has already been merged into the Mission's program portfolio as SO-3; the Former Child Combatants project will be handed off to the Mission when the current OTI representative ends his assignment in January, 2002). Neither the IDP program nor the Former Child Combatants initiative would have been launched as quickly--nor developed as well--in the absence of OTI support for their development and management. In summary, Phase II activities were as follows:

OTI-Funded “Hybrid” (community and civil society focus) Project:

Project: “Strengthening Peace Through Civil Society Initiatives at the Community Level”

Grantee: International Organization for Migration (IOM)

OTI-Developed/INL-Funded Projects:

Project: Colombia Former Child Soldier Reintegration Program

Cooperative Agreement: International Organization for Migration

Project: Addressing the Needs of Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Grantee: International Organization for Migration, UNICEF, World Vision, the Pan American Development Foundation, and PROFAMILIA

B. Description and Assessment: Phase II

i. OTI-Funded Project: *“Strengthening Peace Through Civil Society Initiatives at the Community Level”*

Background and Description: Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this project is that it exists at all. As noted above, USAID/Colombia management had generally concluded in early 2000 that OTI’s work in the country would likely be confined to oversight of OTI’s then-current portfolio, and to development of the new IDP initiative (the Former Child Combatants opportunity was to emerge a few months later). Yet OTI was able to design and implement the new IOM activity even after this presumably terminal understanding had been reached with the Mission.

The broad outlines for the new project were developed during a May, 2000 visit to Colombia by the OTI/LAC Team Leader. Following meetings with the director and staff of the Javiariana project, the OTI team leader and country representative concluded that OTI’s support for the national peace process was not going well through that particular mechanism--but that some opportunities to promote peace did exist at the local level. The project that emerged from this decision to seek alternative support mechanisms for the peace process included several attractive and innovative features--even for a Mission that was somewhat skeptical of OTI’s continuing utility. These features included: 1) a continuing opportunity to maintain a “human face” on the Mission’s overall program--a program (the USG-assisted portion of Plan Colombia) which was still being perceived in Colombia and on Capitol Hill as a military assistance effort with a very thin developmental veneer; 2) an opportunity to recapture the “missed” role for civil society, with special focus on the participation of hitherto little-known NGOs in the peace process; 3) an opportunity to enhance the accuracy and quality of popular debate on the peace process, and to correct the misinformation campaigns of the guerilla; and 4) an opportunity to develop and test innovative models (“catalyst projects”) which might have

the potential to have an impact beyond the life of their OTI funding (assuming the readiness of other donors to continue support for their activities). The project later included creative approaches to reach special groups (women, youth, war victims, DPs, etc.) affected by the conflict, but generally excluded from the development and peace process.

Another attractive aspect of the project was its partnership with IOM--a highly respected, UN-affiliated organization whose very good performance in Guatemala and Honduras had been observed first-hand by the OTI/Colombia representative during his previous assignments in those countries. That said, IOM/Colombia's staffing at the program management level was generally viewed as weak by the donor community, including USAID. The OTI/Colombia representative had a personal role in convincing IOM to strengthen the depth and quality of IOM's management team as an informal condition precedent to receipt of USAID grant assistance. IOM's current leadership and program management are very highly regarded by OTI and IOM's partners.

The ongoing two-year (September, 2000-September, 2002) \$1.5 million project is essentially a small grants activity, whereby IOM identifies (mostly indigenous) organizations that meet the criteria noted above, and provides short-term (six months-one year) sub-grants (generally less than \$50,000 each) which support these organizations' various initiatives. The sub-projects themselves are often unconventional. Examples include working with street gangs and former guerillas to produce (highly popular) videos of their efforts to take up more constructive roles in society; support for the "alternative media" efforts of radio stations in conflicted rural communities; training in citizenship, community organization and income-generation for displaced Afro-Colombian youth; an urban "Memory and Peace Murals" project for young artists in Cali, etc. Other projects are more conventional: journalism training for print and other media professionals and the development of websites for accurate information on the conflict; development of "Guides on Municipal Development" for leaders and staff at hundreds of local communities; institutional strengthening of the Peace Commission Offices in five departments, etc. The cross-cutting theme underscored by IOM, however, is that all of these several activities are helping to create a "culture for peace"--which, if not national in scope, is probably affecting the actions and attitudes of the direct and indirect beneficiaries reached by the project.

Performance: IOM has approved 24 sub-grants over the life of the project. No new sub-grants will be approved after December, 2001. The final year (project ends September, 2002) will be used for oversight of the ongoing sub-grants and eventual closeout of the project.

The individual subprojects appear to be performing well, although few of them are structured to produce measurable impacts. IOM is sensitive to this, and is struggling to develop performance standards for activities often designed to affect attitudes and long-term behavior, rather than specific "products" such as workshops, publications, students

trained, diseases cured, etc.

Impact: The project was launched in September, 2000 as a one-year activity with an initial grant of \$200,000 in OTI funds. The grant agreement has been amended twice, raising the OTI funding level to \$1.5 million, and extending the project an additional year, to September, 2002 (almost one year beyond the departure of the current OTI country representative). OTI's readiness to expand the activity was due to several factors, most notably including 1) a shared view with IOM that many of the subprojects are indeed changing the individual lives of their beneficiaries, and are possibly contributing to the emergence of a more open, tolerant and democratic mindset within the several subprojects' "catchment basins"; 2) the project's success in finding and enhancing the role of innovative new NGOs; and 3) OTI's high regard for IOM's professionalism in managing the project.

Some USAID/Colombia personnel, on the other hand, tend to be dismissive of the project, citing its focus on small, highly-localized activities that have little prospect of meaningful impact, and the project's perhaps self-indulgent engagement with fringe counterparts (gang members, former/current leftists, urban street artists, etc.). The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. OTI is indeed investing in some high-risk ventures--many of its more provocative subprojects have little chance of continuing post-project in the absence of other-donor support. Moreover, IOM may be providing substitute assistance for activities that existed before the project started, and which will continue after the project ends (e.g., community theater opportunities for DPs in Bogotá; a public information campaign by an international NGO to prevent recruitment of former child combatants). Finally, some of the subprojects are being implemented by sub-grantees which had been previously known to IOM program managers--in some cases on a personal level. This may be, at least in part, a response to the need to get activities under way in a short period of time--thus the tendency to work with organizations known by IOM to be competent. But it also creates the appearance--even if unfair--of favoritism in the grants award process.

That said, several of the project's sub-grants do appear to be leaving a significant "footprint" in Colombia: the "Guides on Municipal Development" activity is reaching thousands of local-level decision makers and managers, and is likely to play an important role in USAID's larger effort to address corruption and mismanagement in the country's municipalities. The project's alternative media, website support and journalism training efforts are helping inject accurate, objective reporting into an environment too-often characterized by error, deliberate distortion and rumor. The project's outreach to neglected sub-groups such as the Afro-Colombian community may be helping to create a leadership cadre whose debt to the project won't be clear--if ever--for another decade. The value of some of these subprojects has in fact been recognized by the Mission--as demonstrated by the SO 1 (Democracy and Governance) Team's intention to assume ongoing responsibility for the Municipal Guides, journalism training and website activities under SO 1's own Peace Grants Project with IOM.

The USAID Mission's larger (\$2.7 million) Peace Grants Project (also with IOM) would probably not exist, in fact, if the earlier OTI-funded ("*Small Peace Grants Project*") initiative had not tested, demonstrated and refined the grant-making and grant management methodology later adopted by the Mission project. Moreover, IOM's success in managing the OTI Small Peace Grants Project--and IOM's constructiveness in working with OTI--were fundamental considerations behind the USAID Mission's subsequent decisions to work with IOM on other Mission initiatives as well, including the Former Child Combatants project, and the IDP program (see below).

Finally, the small grants model developed by OTI is soon to be adopted by the US Embassy in Bogota. Specifically, the embassy's political section expects to receive \$250,000 in ILN funds in the near future, and plans to implement its own small grants program along the lines of the OTI effort. The OTI Colombia representative is providing operational guidance and advice to his Emb/Pol counterparts to help ensure the successful implementation of the embassy program.

To summarize, the IOM Small Peace Grants Project appears to have produced some notable results, including:

- Development of selected interventions which are advancing broader US policy interests in Colombia (truth in media, improved governance at local levels)
- The identification of IOM as a valuable working partner for USAID/C (IOM currently manages four USAID-funded grants), and the development of the *modus operandi* between IOM and USAID for management of those four programs.
- Development of a model for the Mission's Peace Grants Project and for the US Embassy's similar small grants project.
- A likely positive impact on the attitudes of project beneficiaries toward peace, the value of civil discourse in resolving differences, and the capacity of citizens' organizations to influence public policy.

Whether or not the project actually attained any portion of its ultimate objective--the promotion of peace--is open to conjecture. The collapse of the peace process in Colombia was certainly not due to any shortcomings of this modest activity; but it would probably be over-reaching to suggest that the project might have played a significant role in furthering that process either--at least in the short term. A more conservative, albeit more confident assessment would conclude that the activity produced models and tools that were picked up by the USAID Mission so that the latter could do its work more effectively; and that the seeds left behind by the project may--may--some day produce results which will never be credited to the project

ii. **OTI-Developed & Managed/ILN-Funded Project:** *“Colombia Former Child Soldier Reintegration Program”*

Background and Description: The child combatants issue is, of course, an international one--with special relevance in countries such as Sierra Leone, Angola, Uganda, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name a few. The problem is similarly acute in Colombia, where 3000-7000 child soldiers (accurate estimates are not available) are serving in the country's three largest armed rebel groups. One informal estimate suggests, for example, that up to one-third of the Colombian armed factions' personnel are probably 18 years of age and younger.

In July, 2000 President Clinton signed a supplemental appropriations act which provided funding for the US-supported portion of Plan Colombia. That legislation included a \$2.5 million earmark directing the administration to design and implement a program to reintegrate into Colombian society former child soldiers who had served in various armed factions. The legislative history leading up to the earmark had initially identified the International Labor Organization (ILO) of the United Nations as the implementing agency for the program. OTI nonetheless actively sought--and secured--the lead responsibility for the initiative, citing OTI's prior experience with demobilization and reintegration programs in Haiti, Guatemala, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and the Balkans. OTI's capacity was further enhanced by the personal experience of the OTI country representative, who had worked in support of child combatant issues in Guatemala and Angola prior to joining OTI. Moreover, the child combatants topic had been on OTI's country agenda throughout 1998-2000--reflected in the Salesian Missions' scholarship program, and in a number of the IOM's small "peace grants" to organizations working on the child combatants problem.

OTI was therefore in a position to move rapidly once the earmark was in place--and had in fact been more-or-less anticipating the challenge well before the July 2000 date of the legislation. In fact, the initial stimulus for a USG response to the issue occurred in 1998, when the newly-elected President Pastrana asked President Clinton for US assistance in addressing the child combatants problem. To put this request in perspective, it should be recalled that Pastrana had campaigned as a "peace candidate", and had promised to engage the armed factions in negotiations that could lead to peace--and therefore to a major demobilization of the rebel militias. Pastrana had concluded that the country was not prepared to respond to the psycho-social, educational or economic needs of thousands of young people who might be quickly demobilized as the result of success in the peace negotiations. When the July, 2000 earmark provided significant resources to address the issue, OTI was able to immediately begin at least the preliminary design work on a new project.

In October, 2000 an OTI project design team headed by the OTI Team Leader for Latin America visited Colombia for two weeks to complete development of the "Former Child Soldier Reintegration Program". Building on the OTI/Colombia representative's

previous data-gathering work and consultations with prospective partners, the OTI team was able to quickly design a comprehensive new project that included three key elements: 1) institutional strengthening of GOC and NGO capacity to receive, support, counsel, train and successfully reintegrate former child soldiers; 2) development of a quick-response mechanism in the event of large-scale releases of child soldiers in the future; and 3) efforts to clarify the legal status of child soldiers.

IOM submitted its proposal to OTI in December, 2000. Beginning in January 2001, the OTI/LAC Team Leader met several times with representatives of Senator Harkin's office, as well as with representatives of the labor groups which had strongly promoted the senator's legislative earmark. The purposes of these meetings were to obtain the participants' feedback on the project's draft design, and to assure these parties that OTI was prepared and able to manage the program in a manner consistent with the vision set forth in the earmark. The senator's office and the labor groups signaled their approval of the OTI project design in February.

In March 2001, USAID and IOM executed a two-year, \$2.5 million cooperative agreement whereby IOM would implement the new project. IOM's key counterpart in the project is the GOC Family Welfare Institute, known by its Spanish initials as ICBF. Save the Children/United Kingdom participates in the project as a sub-grantee.

Once beyond the initial planning and organizational steps, the parties to the agreement focused on the project's first major task--improving the technical, professional and physical capacity of ICBF's four pilot "specialized treatment centers" (opened in 1999), and the preparation and opening of new centers, some of which would be managed by NGOs working under the policy direction of ICBF. (According to the pilot system developed by ICBF, each of the centers is structured to provide housing, counseling and vocational skills training for 20-22 youths). Specifically, the project provides resources to improve operations at the four pilot ICBF facilities; for the construction and initial operating costs of two additional treatment centers (one in Macondo, north of Bogotá, and another in Cali); and for the operation of one emergency reception center, in Bogotá, which attends to the needs of child combatants who need special care and/or attention before proceeding to one of the specialized treatment centers.

The project has also begun work on the legal status of ex-combatant children. The focus of this part of the project is being revised, however, to concentrate on training of Juvenile Defenders and Judges of Minors, rather than on the more intractable issue of changing laws that relate to the children.

The long-term success of the reintegration effort will depend on the ability of ICBF, other GOC agencies such as the *Reinsercion* Office of the Ministry of Interior, and various indigenous NGOs to address the continuing (i.e., post-treatment center) needs of the ex-combatants. This phase of the project is still in its early stages, and will be a special focus of the project during its remaining 15 months.

Performance: Although the project has been effectively under way for only seven months (since April, 2001), it is already well ahead of schedule in meeting some of its objectives. Two new specialized treatment centers (one in Macondo, the other in Cali) have been brought “on line”; the new Reception Center in Bogotá is fully functioning; and 200 former child combatants have been attended to by the treatment centers since the project started. That 200 figure is significant because it represents the *end-of-project* (early 2003) objective for the project. More precisely, the project was designed to attend to 200 youths under normal circumstances, i.e., in the absence of a large-scale demobilization, and up to 600 additional ex-combatants in the event of a major release (or several quasi-major releases) of young soldiers. Together, the two sub-targets amount to 800 ex-combatants over the life of the project. The project’s sub-goal of 200 ex-combatants has already been reached.

OTI rightly views this rapid attainment of one of its objectives as an indication that the project’s original target was set too low, and is working with IOM and ICBF to raise the project’s target of “normal circumstances” ex-combatants to approximately 400-500. A contingency plan to manage a significant increase in the release-rate of child soldiers has been developed. That plan would nonetheless require more intense use of existing facilities and/or the use of encampments and other temporary measures, so it may not be adequate in the event of a major demobilization.

ICBF’s methodical approach to the project may be inconsistent with the need to do some more aggressive forward-thinking regarding ex-combatant’s needs after they leave the centers--needs that will include assignment, if needed, to halfway houses; family placement; ongoing vocational training and job placement; access to legal services; access to income-generation opportunities supported by other GOC agencies (such as *Reinsercion*), etc. OTI and IOM are trying to ensure that ICBF participates in that longer-term planning process; but ICBF staff sometimes perceive these OTI and IOM urgings as pressure on ICBF to take on too much too soon--possibly at the risk of jeopardizing the overall quality of services at existing centers. OTI and IOM plan to work as closely as possible with ICBF in developing the critically-important reintegration phase of the project; but they are also prepared to develop that later phase with other agencies--such as *Reinsercion*--if ICBF is not ready to fully engage in the effort.

Both OTI and IOM point out that ICBF’s conservative approach to the project can also be interpreted in a positive sense. They emphasize, for example, that ICBF takes its responsibilities under the project very seriously, and that ICBF’s concerns arise from their desire to preserve a high quality of care for seriously traumatized youth. That commitment to quality is evident in the centers themselves, where staff are attentive to the young people under their supervision, interact well with them, and are providing professional care of consistently high caliber. ICBF is also participating substantively in its own institutional strengthening: it has doubled the size of its core project management team (from four to eight), and has successfully recruited managers, psychologists and

educators who seem to be well-prepared and well-motivated for their roles. Although ICBF is responsible for the welfare of some 74,000 young people in ICBF orphanages, shelters and other facilities, the head of the agency takes a close and supportive interest in the project.

The performance of the sub grantee Save the Children in the project has disappointed IOM and ICBF. Representatives of the latter two agencies point out that Save has done little if anything to date with the resources (\$140,000) it has received under its IOM subgrant--resources it was supposed to use to provide technical assistance at the treatment centers and to develop psycho-social counseling materials and training sessions. IOM and ICBF individually and separately agree that the project would function more smoothly--and economically--without Save; but neither organization wants to take the lead in terminating a relationship with an NGO which is held in such high international esteem in the field of child health. IOM and ICBF have apparently agreed to adopt a passive stance whereby they will continue to hope for better performance by Save. Neither organization, however, is prepared to take any openly hostile action (such as terminating the sub-grant--a move which OTI would support) up to the time the subgrant expires in a few months' time.

Impact: The most obvious impact of the project has been its central role in creating the prospect of safe, constructive lives for the 200 young people who have been reached thus far by the activity. That impact will be deepened and expanded as the project attends to additional ex-combatants, and as it develops its follow-on/post-treatment components. As noted above, however, much work needs to be done to better prepare ICBF to manage a prospective (and perhaps sudden) release of child combatants, and to adopt a more vigorous timetable for development of post-treatment services for the affected youth. As the only institution in Colombia with formal responsibility for the reception and treatment of former child soldiers, the future of the reintegration effort depends heavily on ICBF's ability to support and sustain the program. An important test of that resolve will emerge in year two of the project, when the GOC and ICBF are obliged, per the terms of their agreement, to assume responsibility for 50% of the operating costs of the specialized treatment centers (and 100% of those costs by the beginning of year 3). USAID/Colombia, which assumes management responsibility for the project in January, 2002, should closely monitor ICBF's compliance with this requirement.

An unintended, if positive, result of this project was its effect on USAID-OTI relations. As explained previously, USAID/Colombia management had been skeptical regarding OTI's continuing relevance in the country as the new and enlarged Mission took shape in early 2000. However, OTI's skill and responsiveness in developing this high-visibility project changed some minds in the Mission. Indeed, OTI's work on the Child Combatants earmark--and its work to develop the IDP initiative (discussed below)--cast OTI in the role of "indispensable partner" at a critical period in the Mission's program development phase. At the risk of overstatement, OTI success in designing and launching this project (and the IDP program) effectively "rehabilitated" OTI in the eyes of Mission

personnel who had been resentful of OTI's autonomy and free-wheeling ways.

iii. OTI-Developed/Mission-Managed Program: *Addressing the Needs of Internally Displaced Persons*

Background and Description: Colombia has one of the highest rates of forced internal displacement in the world. By 2001, approximately 1.5 million persons had left their homes, farms and livelihoods in the country's conflicted areas, and had sought refuge in cities and municipalities. Such involuntary upheaval can shatter the lives of the displaced persons, and places huge social and economic burdens on destination communities ill-prepared to support sizeable new population groups.

Not surprisingly then, a joint USAID/OTI assessment team that visited Colombia in 1998 identified the plight of IDPs as a key focus for their respective program design efforts. OTI was, as noted above, the first USG agency to support IDP-oriented programs in Colombia, (during the course of which it developed many of the intervention strategies which would later be reflected in the larger, Mission-funded program). Once USAID/Colombia began to organize itself to address the IDP issue (November 1999-January 2000), it turned to OTI to design that program.

The Mission's decision to enlist OTI (i.e., the new resident OTI representative) in the task was, to a considerable extent, borne of necessity. The new Mission Director had earlier asked USAID/Washington for authority to recruit a personal services contractor who would be responsible for design and management of the IDP program--but that request was denied. The Mission, moreover, was very thinly-staffed at this critical period-- while it was being charged with the task of developing a five-year, \$500 million program (the USG component of Plan Colombia). The Mission Director--taking note of the Mission's near-desperate staffing situation, as well as the new OTI representative's personal experience with IDP programs--instructed the OTI representative to take on the IDP design assignment. This instruction was consistent with the new Mission Director's determination that OTI would function in Colombia as a fully-integrated element of the USAID Mission.

Over the next several months, the resident OTI representative consulted widely with Colombian and international counterparts knowledgeable about the country's IDP problem, and drew on support from OTI/Washington to refine the program's design elements. He also maintained close contact with USAID's regional legal adviser and procurement officer to ensure that his consultations with prospective participants in the program were consistent with Agency policy and procurement procedures. Under the procurement officer's guidance, he managed the receipt and review process for several unsolicited proposals from prospective implementing agencies, to the point that virtually all of the pre-award tasks had been completed before Plan Colombia funds were allotted to the Mission for this initiative in September, 2000. The Mission was consequently able to execute five grants with the selected implementing agencies within 24 hours of receipt of those funds. The IDP program fashioned by OTI represented approximately \$30

million of the \$120 million obligated by the Mission in FY 2000.

The OTI representative served as program manager for the five grants (the Mission's SO-3) through their October 2000-January 2001 startup phase, after which time USAID/C assumed responsibility for the program. As the IDP program is still relatively new, and since OTI is not managing the program during its ongoing implementation phase, this assessment does not report on the performance or impact of the IDP program. It is possible, however, to identify some of the key products of OTI's role in developing and launching this important new initiative. These included:

- An IDP assistance program that included innovative response mechanisms to address the needs of Colombia's displaced persons, as well as tried-and-tested methodologies to reach these communities; and
- A fully-developed "package" of five grants, for which virtually all developmental, administrative and start-up requirements had been met, and which was "implementation-ready" when transferred from the OTI project developer to the USAID Mission program managers

Finally, and as mentioned previously, OTI's indispensable assistance in pulling this program together helped create a positive climate for OTI's exit in January, 2002.

V. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OTI/Colombia program is closing out within one month, so any program-specific recommendations would have very limited utility for OTI in that country. However, some of the lessons that emerged from OTI/Colombia's experience, and their associated recommendations, may have potential relevance for other country programs which are currently receiving OTI support --or which may be candidates for future OTI assistance.

Lesson 1: The design of new country programs requires the involvement of person(s) who have in-depth personal/professional experience in the prospective recipient country. In such circumstances OTI needs to take care to ensure that proposed programs reflect objectively-determined needs, and that they are not the product of consultants' personal biases and/or preconceptions.

Recommendation 1: OTI assessment teams responsible for the design of new country programs should include at least one person who is knowledgeable of --and experienced in--the cultural, developmental and political environment in the prospective recipient country. OTI should challenge its design teams to present the reasons why their action recommendations would more likely address OTI and USG objectives than would other prospective interventions which had been considered but discarded in the assessment process.

Lesson 2: The SWIFT family of contractors/grantees may not be OTI's most appropriate rapid-response mechanism in some countries.

Recommendation 2: OTI should consider the special requirements of each country as it selects its implementing (contractor/grantee) partners. In some countries, e.g., in high-risk security environments or in highly-charged political environments, better results might be achieved by working with international and/or indigenous organizations not clearly-identifiable as USG contractors.

Lesson 3: Achievement of the task (conflict resolution; improved dialogue among contentious parties; a successful transition from strife to peace and stability, etc.) is more important than accretion of "credit" to the USG, including OTI.

Recommendation 3: Whenever necessary and appropriate, OTI should be prepared to provide its support without fanfare, publicity or public relations efforts that might impede the ability of OTI's in-country partners to perform their tasks. This low profile might require waivers to dispense with USAID markings on project vehicles and other commodities, eschewing prominent roles at OTI-supported conferences, workshops, etc., and deference to partners' claims of success in peace promotion efforts.

Lesson 4: Good ideas can go bad; projects that looked promising during the design stage don't always work out as planned. It's OK to shut them down and move on. The determination that a project is not performing may often be subjective; but when subjective and/or anecdotal evidence of non-performance is compelling, OTI managers need not rely on "hard" data to make their decision to terminate a program.

Recommendation 4: The nature of OTI's high-stakes assignment requires that it support high-risk activities, i.e., when the potential end-result (a cessation of conflict and a transition to peace) may warrant OTI investment in areas/activities normally avoided by USAID. When the prospects or performance of such activities fall consistently short of expectations, OTI should feel no reluctance to terminate the activity(s), and refocus its resources on other promising initiatives.

Lesson 5: OTI plays an essential role in USAID; but its speed, agility and creativity--especially in the context of the Agency's "normal" procedures--frequently provoke resentment elsewhere in USAID. These resentments--which may seriously impede OTI's effectiveness--can be avoided by simple considerations and courtesies *vis-à-vis* other elements of the Agency. OTI personnel changes, with consequent differences in managers' operating styles, can also have a profound effect on OTI's success in dealing with other elements of the agency.

Recommendation 5: OTI needs to maintain, to the fullest extent practicable, its unique operating style, quasi-autonomy and reporting channels. These should not, however, be allowed to emerge as conflict issues with other-bureau or USAID mission management. OTI should present its special capacities (speed, flexibility) as a valuable tool--rather than as a challenge--to Agency partners, and should be sensitive to Agency colleagues' expectations regarding information-sharing, program review and approval authority, and when appropriate, supervisory relationships *vis-à-vis* Mission-level PSCs.

Lesson 6: The "Transition" component of OTI's mandate need not imply a transition from strife to peace. The OTI/ Colombia program illustrates OTI success in effecting a different kind of transition, i.e., from the development of small, pilot activities that help identify program objectives, methodologies, and partners--and which develops model approaches to achieve these larger objectives--to a larger bilateral assistance program that incorporates many of those objectives, approaches and models. Under this kind of scenario, OTI's job is accomplished not when a conflict-resolution or peace process is well on track, but rather when a USAID Mission has the funds, personnel and program in place to continue without further need for OTI assistance.

Recommendation 6: OTI should consider adopting a broader definition of its mandate to include service as a “vanguard” element of USAID, prepared to help identify key US policy interests in candidate countries, and to launch/support pilot activities to identify, test and strengthen organizations which might be USAID’s potential partners in an expanded assistance program.

Lesson 7: OTI can work successfully in high-security risk environments, often through indigenous and/or international NGOs not generally identified as USG contractors or intermediaries. When OTI determines that such (grant) relationships would be the most effective way to further USG/OTI objectives, OTI should be prepared to accept the tradeoff between enhanced access to target populations, and diminished rigor in the collection and reporting of empirical and/or qualitative data normally used to assess project performance.

Recommendation 7: OTI should be flexible in its application of project performance and evaluation criteria. Performance data for programs implemented in high-risk areas can not always meet the quantitative and qualitative standards expected of projects implemented in more secure areas.

ANNEX A: PERSONS CONTACTED

USAID/Washington:

Russell Porter, DCHA/OTI Team Leader for Latin America and the Caribbean
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USAID/Colombia:

Kenneth Ellis, Mission Director
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Jeffrey Bakken, Supervisory General Development Officer
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Christina Schultz, SO 1 Team Leader, Democracy and Governance Division
Harry Wing, Project Manager-Alternative Development
Jennifer VerNooy, SO-3 (IDPs) Team Leader
David Gould, OTI Country Representative
Laura Zambrano, IDP Program Manager

OTI Partners and Counterparts/Colombia:

Julian Fernando Aguirre Buenaventura, Program Coordinator, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF)
Mabel Gonzalez, Project Coordinator for Ex-combatant Children, ICBF
Ellen Beattie, Coordinator, Red de Solidaridad (Ministry of Interior, GOC)
Manuel Manrique Castro, UNICEF Representative
Cesar Romero Rodriguez, Program Coordinator for Displaced Persons, UNICEF
Katie Kerr, Program Officer, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Marcelo Pisani, Program Officer, IOM
Marta Yolanda Gonzales, Program Officer/Peace Grants, IOM
Maria Alicia Fuentes, Program Officer/Child Combatants, IOM
Georges Comninos, Chief of Mission, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
Geert Haghebaert, Program Coordinator for Health and Welfare, ICRC
Liliana Schmitz, Director of Public Relations, PROFAMILIA
Jaime Buitrago Ruiz, Finance Officer, PROFAMILIA
Samuel Albarracin, IDP Project Officer, World Vision

Constanza Vieira, Acting Project Director, Medios Para La Paz
Gloria Herney Galindez, President, Asociacion de Familiares de Detinidos Desaparecidos (ASFADDES)
Vilma A. Gomez P., Secretary General, Coalition Against the Involvement of Children in the Armed Conflict in Colombia
Ernesto Borda Medina, Director, Institute for Human Rights and International Relations, Javiariana University
Arturo Guerrero, Journalist/Trainer, Medios Para La Paz
Florinda Martinez Castro, Director of Develoment, Salesian Missions
Fr. Guillermo Marquez, Diocese of Grondde.
Jose Amir, Director of Youth Artists Project, Diocese of Cali
Msgr. Jesus Gonzales, Director, Don Bosco Vocational Training Center, Cali
Jorge Montoya, Director, Macondo Specialized Treatment Center
Carmen Ocampo Velasquez, Co-Director, Macondo Specialized Treatment Center
Enrique King, Director, Kaisos Reception Center, Bogota
Gustavo Bolivar, TV Director
Cesar Serrano, Gang member/actor
Jose Baguero, Ward Representative, Ciudad Bolivar, Bogota
Carlos Satizabal, Director, Cultura Callejera para Salir de la Hoguera
Catalina Valencia, Director, PROCOMUN

ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY

This assessment was conducted in accordance with the scope of work (SOW) appended to this report as annex D.

The consultant prepared for the assignment by reviewing OTI/Colombia project files at the USAID/DCHA/OTI office in Washington, and by interviewing key members of OTI/Washington staff. Additional interviews were conducted with former USAID staff, current employees of the LAC Bureau, and with Washington-based individuals who had been involved in, or were aware of, the OTI/Colombia program--including the earlier phase (1998-2000) of the program. Additional interviews were conducted with Washington-based representatives of OTI-funded grantee institutions. Telephone interviews were conducted with US-based personnel not residing in the Washington DC area.

Fieldwork in Colombia (October 29-November 10, 2001) included interviews with the OTI/Colombia representative, USAID/Colombia staff, and representatives of OTI-funded grantee institutions which participate, or had participated in, the OTI/Colombia program. The consultant visited the offices and/or project sites of approximately one dozen sub-grantees of OTI-funded grantee organizations, and interviewed sub-grantee personnel responsible for project implementation. Most of these observation visits and interviews were conducted in Bogota due to security-related restrictions on travel within Colombia. Fieldwork did include, however, travel to Macondo (north of Bogota), and to Cali. Fieldwork conducted outside of Bogota included interviews with beneficiaries of OTI-supported projects.

The assessment report was prepared in the U.S. following the consultant's return from Colombia, and was submitted to DCHA/OTI on December 7, 2001.